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Quiet enough to hear finches chew their seed.
Then some cars come by the highway and the birds
Answer. No one knows if language everywhere
Is threat or consolation. We use what we are said.

17 May 1993

THE PURPLE HUNT

1.

I want to say: In Hammerfest
the Society of Polar Bears
welcomes one more Luxemburger.
But the flag is wrong— memory
flies its colors upside down
black over purple over red
gradually coming into sense
of focus. This old red relevance
the want the need this blessed
appetite this Me-land
who am no France no West
no even-handed shrugging Orient.
I love the morning because I'm here
wrong as ever, on my way to night.

2.

Deer in dapple step along the ridge.
Or will if I keep my eye fixed on that one
glare of sunlight after all night rain
up there in tree shade on the hill.
It's the safest way to go —other side rock fall
to the stream down shelters. Way to pond.
I'm not sure I'm ready for all this.
Bruit of necessity. Speaking of flags, how
about this hand, raised to signal
nothing to someone — but I like its color
in the sun, my own, as if I had
been here as long as it has, up there,
and we're both just part of the weather,

forever! Some consolation for being blue.

3.

The information that I so require — red,
white, mingling to produce not rose
but one instantaneous flash of permanent light—
brilliance before colors, essence bright—
has to come this way. I have put myself
in the way of information, I lie down
on the crown of roads, there is no other way
for it to travel. It will pass through me
on its way to the world, and I'll know only
what at first I think are flowers blossoming
inside my head, then I'll pluck the petals
light by light until the dark of their fall
turns absolute, the clarity *before* the light
silent as an animal between fear and desire.

17 May 1993

SUN IN RATTLESNAKE, SATURN IN BAT

Looking at the chart of the sky
you faxed me this dawn
the question arises
as part of my nature
am I able
to reconstitute
the formality
of this fleshy experience
to wit, am I
and now prepared to rename the zodiac
I'm asking, I wonder
at the necessity of this long striving
is it the weather

is it finally the moment to renew?
is there a defect in the silence itself?

to name them,
those tender animals
who have presided over our chances
and led us this to pass
between the weather and the mind

perfectly blue over the oak there

*

what would you call it, firstling, the sheep of it?
I dare not name them,
the worm of it would come
and bite me Herod-wise
from inside out

the way the Zodiac is run
from outside in.

*

for the men who came and conquered the deer people
had read, all of them, pages from a certain book
o not the whole book no man
could ever read that short as it is
the words would dazzle a man of them the horse people
the ship people the hair people
the people with something on their minds

and the pages that they read
filled them with fear and said a certain king
slew children and slew a prophet and slew finally himself
standing in the face of all the people
in his silk and silver shirt
the worms came out and ate him up
and each king was a different king but there names
were always the same

we are the people whose names are the same
“we all know our names, they are John”
the woman wrote
since she had seen them at their play
the men of them
coming with their horses and their guns

[Diane Wakoski, ca 1961]

to eat the deer people the way a crow eats a fallen deer
from the outside in
picking at the fallen of them first
and then they ate the king

*

could he have changed his Fate by
changing the names of his stars?
that is the question the book has in it
if Herod said My horn in the constellation of the Blood Flower
be exalted, my Moon in perigee among the Clams!
(for what is close to us is wet and soft and closes in

and the last thing we hear is our name
spoken by the dry lips of everything we have slain)

would he have triumphed in his silver shirt
and would the G-d fearing Jews have sweltered
on forever in the unforgiveness of history

after all a king has something to say

usually a king has something to give
usually a god
a god for his people
a god in silver a goddess with her tall brown pole
set up on the hillsides

and are we tired of hills yet
we who have not yet learned
to rub milk on the mouths of mountains?

*

I am scared of giving new names
before the old have finished speaking

but if the world felt that way
the moon would never come
to rename the sun-stricken argument
into violet forgiveness

I guess a day lasts as long as it does
I guess a name all of a sudden sets behind the mountain
and a new one comes
the Mongoose the Woodchuck Moon
the Redheaded Woodpecker
shouts the dawn up

and it all is changed
and no one is watching
the Easy Cosmos is always beside itself
with busyness

we can get away with murder
slip our silver shirts on over this nice skin
and forgive a few new words into the light

I see the moon is in the Skeleton
it will change my mind.

17 May 1993
responding to
Dennis Tedlock

The dark of dawn and looks it, eight A.M.
another day that Billie H. won't die
and the Civil War is almost ended now, faxes
shimmer back and forth between Richmond and D.C.

How close we always are to war!—
the rhododendron flowers vast rosy blossom
triggering the air, I must be an old man
some day and taste the beauty of all this seeming.

18 May 1993

The wings of the blue
jay scatter
seed hulls
he
takes off from
heeding them

the motion
& the emotion
gone into greenery
gratitude for air.

18 May 1993

Moderately we are born
to keep watch
tell time and hold the doorway
dreaming

hurtless to dwell

and then another.

But there's a breath in that
can breathe me better,

old evil asthma of the earth
gets around to choking.

Then who'll keep watch
on our breathing,
cycles of in and out,
the so-called weather?

Today we'll drive to the mountains
and consider the differences.

We are not here
for another
but no way to help
me without helping
all of them.

Call it the Elephant
it can carry it can fetch
but where is the animal
when you take the earth away?

Or there is an attention that lasts
longer than what is heeded, longer
than the attender.

Then some other

arises
to dwell in that perceiving
hurtless, unharried.

18 May 1993

for Charlotte

We're getting closer to your island
beautiful fragment

subject to the magus Ocean
but no crows live on it

already I'm missing them
though the gulls of my childhood wait there for me

over the surge of the moraine
up out of the broken crystal of the waves

to make a little place for us again
content under their high clamor.

18 May 1993

RED LION INN

The rigorous estrangement
between people in the street and
the gone ones who sit on the high porch
and wait for the traffic to talk.
Every car a grandchild. Every fear a hope.

18 May 1993
Stockbridge

Walking in the rain
among things with names.

18 May 1993
Clermont

THE CONTRACT

This world is the fine print of what?
We sign it all day long.

18/19 May 1993
written in dream

THE PIN-UP

1.

I want to see you today
before I depart inside myself
for a meaningless journey
collecting large sums of valueless currency

violet banknotes of Lebanon
pinned to the wall in an empty house.
Shape of stove against plaster
but the stove's gone. Shape of goat
in the straw but the goat's dead.

2.

Pin this to your wall, some words
of beefcake like your favorite animus

Look at it every morning and say: The world
is full of people who love me and it does no good.

3.

A species of religious fervor or induced
ecphrasy such that the beholder trances out
loud as if creating what is beheld—

and the gates of the future fall wide open
like the straw splinters they're made of
and next week's weather gleams like your mother's eyes.

You are a hero and have betrayed everything.
Every word is your epitaph.
You would jump off the rooftop

but you are the roof, flat and exalted and bare.

19 May 1993

COWBIRDS

Like self-deluded monks in Bosch or Breughel
the cowbirds fossick among seed — stupid,
self-blinded, greedy, yet they find
in a miracle of ordinariness just
enough to be what and where they are
breakfasting at peace on a rainy morning
just like me, here, sustained by the same
appetite that will destroy us. And bring us again
back to the table of the elements in some new form
pain after pain. I used to find them ugly.

20 May 1993

Also my feet

how strange they look
naked on their sandals

always trying to grab some earth.

Crow nature, how fearful
he is of the underbrush

sneaking in so big
for morning offerings

sidling like me under wet leaves
—anything that can touch is danger—

and seizes and flies! sideways
out into the lower sky

while my toes are still gripping tight.

20 May 1993

Adjust my inventory
that is the names I have
in hand to hope with

**gaudh-* "to cry out, to call upon"
the book says and the book
is nothing but saying

never a being for all my saying
never an is.
Adjust the white silk

around my neck like a flyer
in some obsolete war
the consonants of a new word

get in the way of the old
I try to say into I say obtrude
I never know what the words

will say next
I never know what they said
before I was listening

and even now just a lake
with some chestnut trees
in flower haughty beside it

shadows of color
in something you can't walk on
a name you can't call.

20 May 1993

Our own crows.
And other people's words.
What more do we need,
a sky?

21 May 1993